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Conference Abstract

Celebrating BHL Australia through the Eye of the (Tasmanian) Tiger

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Abstract

BHL Australia, the Australian branch of the Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL), was launched in 2010 and began operation with a single organisation, Museums Victoria in Melbourne. Since then, it has grown considerably. Funded by the Atlas of Living Australia, BHL Australia now digitises biodiversity literature on behalf of 42 organisations across the country. These organisations include museums, herbaria, state libraries, royal societies, government agencies, field naturalist clubs and natural history publishers, many of whom lack the resources to do this work themselves. BHL Australia's national consortium model, which makes biodiversity literature accessible on behalf of so many organisations, is unique amongst the BHL global community. Most BHL operations digitise material on behalf of a single organisation.

BHL Australia has now made over 530,000 pages of Australia's biodiversity knowledge freely accessible online. The BHL Australia Collection includes both published works (books and journals) and unpublished material (collection registers, field diaries and correspondence). The pages of these works are filled with species descriptions, references to historically significant people and, most importantly, scientific data that is critical to ongoing research and conservation efforts. Providing access to materials published as far back as the 1600s and as recently as the current year, the collection chronicles the scientific discovery and understanding of Australia's biodiversity.

BHL Australia also leads the global initiative to bring the world's historic biodiversity and taxonomic literature into the modern linked network of scholarly research by incorporating

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article data into BHL and retrospectively assigning DOIs (Digital Object Identifiers) (Kearney et al. 2021). BHL has now assigned more than 162,000 DOIs to historic publications, making them persistently citable and trackable, both within BHL and beyond.

This paper will celebrate the achievements of BHL Australia by journeying through the (now accessible, discoverable and DOI'd) Tasmanian Tiger literature. It will showcase:

- previously elusive descriptions (and beautiful illustrations) of Thylacines, including those by Gerhard Krefft (1871) https://doi.org/10.5962/p.314741, and John Gould (1863) https://doi.org/10.5962/p.312790;
- the invaluable creation of links to open access versions from paywalled publications that should be in the public domain, such as the first description of the Thylacine (Harris 1808): open access on BHL; paywalled by Oxford Academic;
- the many citations of historic taxonomic descriptions that are now appearing as clickable DOI links in modern scholarly articles, taxonomic databases, social media, and Wikipedia (Kearney and Page 2022); and
- the efforts being made to encourage more authors to cite the authoritative source of taxonomic names (Benichou 2022).

The extinction of the Thylacine is a stark reminder of the irreversible consequences that arise from a lack of understanding and appreciation of the natural world. Similarly, a lack of access and/or the inability to find biodiversity knowledge hinders our capacity to learn from the past, impeding scientific progress and conservation efforts.

The Biodiversity Heritage Library was created "to address a major obstacle to scientific research: lack of access to natural history literature" (BHL 2019). BHL Australia has made a substantial contribution to this global mission and has played a significant role in BHL's transition to a fully searchable, persistently linkable component of the biodiversity knowledge graph (Kearney 2020, Page 2016).

Keywords

scholarly publishing, DOIs, Digital Object Identifiers, persistent identifiers, Open Access, paywalls, digitisation, citations, accessibility, discoverability, conservation, taxonomic descriptions

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Conflicts of interest

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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